

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** October 12, 2017

**Agenda Item:** West Kootenai Wildlife Management Area Fire Salvage Project (R1)

**Division:** Wildlife                      **Action Needed:** Endorsement

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 Min

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### **Background**

On September 2, the Caribou Fire made a four-mile run towards the community of West Kootenai, claiming 10 homes and 30 outbuildings and burning through most of the West Kootenai WMA (WKWMA). FWP previously conducted a thinning and fuels reduction project on 250 acres of the 917-acre WKWMA in 2014-2015. One of the goals of this project was to reduce the risk of extreme wildfire behavior in proximity to neighboring properties and infrastructure. Treatments included creating a 100-foot wide fuel break along both sides of 2.3 miles of existing roads through the WKWMA to allow safe ingress and egress by fire suppression personnel in the event of a wildfire. Portions of this fuel break and other thinned areas ultimately became part of a 5-mile dozer line that miraculously held up under red flag conditions that occurred on the night of September 2. During this fire run, approximately 80% of the WMA burned, most of it under high-intensity fire behavior.

FWP staff plan to conduct a thorough site visit of the area to evaluate the post-fire rehab needs and timber salvage opportunity. FWP may propose a timber salvage, if deemed appropriate and consistent with the WKWMA management objectives and FWP's statutory requirements. Fire-damaged timber can lose commercial value due to "checking" and sapwood deterioration relatively quickly so this timber salvage is being proposed to potentially operate in the winter of 2017-18.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

FWP will conduct a site visit and if timber salvage is deemed appropriate, and upon endorsement by the Commission, FWP would complete an environmental assessment and associated public review.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

FWP would evaluate factors associated with timber salvage such as the ecological, economic, and social consequences. Harvesting fire-damaged trees has the potential to affect (positively or negatively) soils and watersheds, risk of insect infestation, susceptibility to reburn, reestablishment of understory vegetation, progression towards short and long-term desired future condition, and snag removal and associated wildlife effects. Timber value can rapidly decline within 3 to 5 years post-fire. Timber value could help pay for or offset the costs of other rehab work such as grass seeding, soil stabilization, noxious weed management, and road drainage improvements.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends the Commission endorse this proposal, which would allow FWP to develop a more detailed analysis and conduct public involvement, if timber salvage is deemed appropriate.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission endorse a timber salvage project on West Kootenai Wildlife Management Area, allowing FWP to complete further analysis and associated public involvement.